DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 033 CS 210 339

AUTHOR Davis, Kevin
TITLE The Role of Peer Tutoring: Steps to Describing a Three-Dimensional Model.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (38th, Atlanta, GA, March 19-21, 1987).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Interaction; Models; Peer Relationship; *Peer Teaching; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Tutoring; Writing (Composition); Writing Evaluation; *Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

A comprehensive, three-dimensional model of peer tutoring, constructed by gathering current theories and research and locating them on a dynamic continuum of the tutoring process, allows researchers to break new ground in tutor research and might eventually offer a new heuristic for training peer tutors. The first axis in the model, the focus continuum, characterizes how the tutor interacts with the writer and text based on person-centered, process-centered, text-centered, and/or rule-governed approaches. This continuum incorporates the views of those advocating mechanical competence, style, and writing as an individual process. The second axis locates the tutorial process along the attitudinal continuum, a perspective based on: pedagogical style, logic, and/or instinct. Together, these two axes comprise the focus of the tutoring situation. The third axis, the interactional continuum, describes the relationship that occurs during the peer tutoring process and is based on the following conversational modes: authoritarian, conversant (collaborative), and/or receiver (student centered). Overall, this three-dimensional model characterizes 36 basic tutoring types which allow for an infinite amount of variation. By identifying locations along the continua as a point of departure, researchers can use the model to designate roles, differentiate between concepts that address only one or two facets of tutoring, and eventually offer a new heuristic for training peer tutors. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED280033

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The Role of Peer Tutoring:
Steps to Describing a Three-Dimensional Model

Kevin Davis

Davis and Elkins College

Elkins, WV 26241

paper presented at the

Conference on College Composition and Communication

Atlanta, Georgia

March, 1987

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kevin M. Davis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 210 339

The Role of Peer Tutoring:

Steps to Describing a Three-Dimensional Model

As long as a concept remains elusive, I have a hard time using it to its fullest potential. I am, of course, quite willing to try new things, to take on the ephemeral, but when I do I somehow feel that all my energy goes to holding on to the thing, keeping it from turning into a pumpkin before it has taken me home.

Peer tutoring, I think, falls in this category of elusive tools. While I encourage peer tutors, I often feel as if I'm driving nails with whimsey. Several descriptions of peer tutoring are available, and each seems suitable some of the time, yet none works in all situations.

Therefore, I feel a need to clarify peer tutoring on a multi-dimensional pattern. Peer tutoring is a useful tool for helping writers explore the possibilities of their words (see Clifford, or Gere and Abbott), but how can we hope to be using any learning tool to its fullest potential when we aren't even sure what the tool is?

An inspection of the literature dealing with peer tutoring will lead any researcher to a rapid conclusion: consensus is non-existant. A few suggestions from the literature show peer tutors possess unusual characteristics.

What do peer tutors do? They converse (Bruffee, "Brooklyn Plan"), they elevate self worth (Roderick), and/or they provide

order and logic (Reigstad and McAndrew), depending on whom you believe. And how do they help writers improve? They identify weaknesses (Lorch), they cyclically give and take ideas (Kail), and/or they serve as a social audience (Hawkins), again depending on the source at hand. And how do these logical, worth-elevating conversants go about cyclically identifying weaknesses while being the audience? Simple. They either rely on pedagogical theory (Simard) or they don't (Beck, et al); they either employ instinct (Hartwell) or expertise (Brannon and Knoblauch). But that is only the beginning. These logically cyclical audience-conversants with instinctual expertise must also simultaneously earn the writers' respect and trust (Brostoff) while creating an atmosphere of doing (Fishman), and bringing students to learn (Freedman). They should also, of course, be flexible (Hurlow).

The point becomes obvious: it will never fly, Wilbur. Faced with this bewildering assortment of contentions, most of us have accepted some of the published theories while rejecting others. We are, in essence, reinventing the airplane every time we want to fly.

Many, perhaps all, of these individual airplanes navigate quite nicely. But the parts don't interchange. Indeed, the airplanes may not even physically resemble one another, and when one of us starts describing her airplane, the rest of us can't help but think of our own.

What I am proposing, then, is a move toward a comprehensive, three-dimensional model of peer tutoring. The model will not replace current theories, but it will attempt to gather and locate each of them as points on continua which remain dynamic throughout the peer process.

The Concepts of Three-Dimensional Tutoring

Focus

We need first to establish a continuum for viewing the writing and the writer. It would have to incorporate diverse views: those which advocate mechanical competence, those which promote style, and those which emphasize writing as an individual process. If we limit our discussion to texts and writers, an axis like that in Figure A will allow us to plot a variety of approaches.

Figure A--Focus Continuum

Kenneth Bruffee ("Peer Tutoring"), for example, generally advocates working at the Person end of the Focus Continuum, seeing learning as a social maturation process, influenced by the conversations of peer tutoring.

Others, such as Harvey Kail, tend to emphasize the process point of the continuum, believing that peer tutoring differs from traditional education by being cylcical rather than linear, by promoting recursive learning.

Still others approach the Text and Rule points. Sue Lorch, for example, claims that tutors need to be skilled in the writing process, not in social interaction, and that tutors should identify a writer's weaknesses.

A tutor might constantly float along this Focus continuum, moving from one extreme to another within a single conference. For a student with a rough draft the tutor might begin with questions of process. Later, the conversation might shift to the clarity and effectiveness of the text itself. As the session continues, it might address rules for solving comma or paragraph confusions. Finally, the conference might return to the Person-centered end of the spectrum as the tutor offers encouragement or compliments. The movement on this continuum is not necessarily progressive nor linear; a conference can recursively move within the spectrum.

Attitude

But how do we decide where to work along the Focus Continuum? Sometimes we decide based on our theoretical allegiances, most of which are manifest as a pedagogical style. Sometimes we are governed by the logic of a situation,

extrapolating direction from the writer's successes and failures. Sometimes we guess, pulling from our bag tricks which might unlock a writer's block, for example. We thus have a second axis, similar to the first, which locates the tutorial along an Attitudinal Perspective:

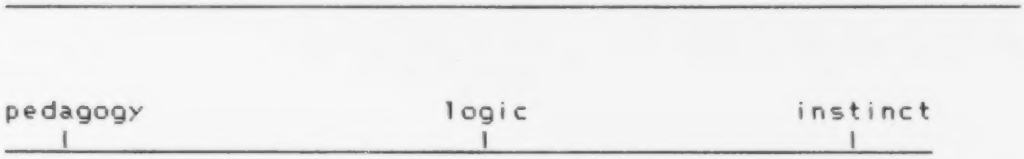


Figure B--Attitudinal Perspective

As with focus, theorists advocate each point along the axis.

Some have advocated particular pedagogical approaches. Simard, for example, specifically advocates pedagogy as equally important to personal concerns, promoting the rhetorical concepts of message senders and receivers. Brannon and Knoblauch also support a pedagogical basis for tutoring, stating there is no particular asset to tutoring unless the tutor possesses expertise and theoretical perspective.

Reigstad and McAndrew, on the other hand, emphasize that tutors provide order and logic to the conversation. Ellson also sides with an ordered, logical approach to tutoring. For tutoring to succeed, according to Ellson, the tutor needs to work from specific instructions and toward limited objectives.

Beck, Hawkins, and Silver suggest that informality and lack of structure benefit tutoring. Emphasizing this lack of structure, Hartwell dismisses pedagogy, saying tutors should avoid being miniature English teachers, relying instead on their instincts, the opposite extreme of the spectrum.

A tutor moves along both the Focus and the Attitudinal Continua, simultaneously adjusting attitude and focus. At any given moment, for example, a tutor might choose to discuss rules of punctuation; that decision might be based on a pedagogical theory (one most know the "basics"), on logic (twelve of fifteen commas on the page are misplaced), or on instinct (the writer is tired of content questions and will leave if structure isn't stressed for a while). Similarly, working from only pedagogical theory, a tutor might decide to first address the writing process, to later discuss the text revision, and finally to explain proof reading procedures. Thus the two lines might cross at any point.

Interactional

These figures, however, remain incomplete. They diagram how we decide about and how we address the tutoring situation, but they make no mention of interaction, perhaps the most often discussed aspect of a tutoring relationship. Research in this area can help name points for the continuum.

In an enthnographic study of conference approaches used by ten professors, Reigstad identified three clearly delineated

types of conversation: tutor centered, collaborative, and student centered. Reigstad is careful to point out that all three types of conference are supportive of the student writers. Further, students rated all three conferencing types as being effective.

Reigstad is not the only person to identify such an interactional continuum. Jacobs and Karliner suggest tutors adopt variable stances toward tutoring, depending on the situation. Tutors might be anything from friendly authoritarians who direct the conversation, to fellow conversants who participate in a conversation, to recorders who transcribe ideas as the writer talks.

Figure C, then, is a third axis which describes these conversational modes.

Figure C--Interactional Continuum

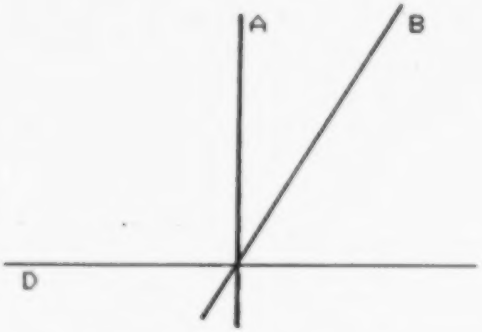
Other theorists and researchers can, of course, be plotted on this axis just as on the others. Bruffee is a Conversant, as is Kail. Roderick and Simard, in their emphasis on message senders and receivers, suggest that tutors should tend mainly to be Receivers. Lorch, by maintaining that tutors have definite responsibilities to identify writing problems and to

guide in addressing those problems, clearly sees tutors as Authority figures.

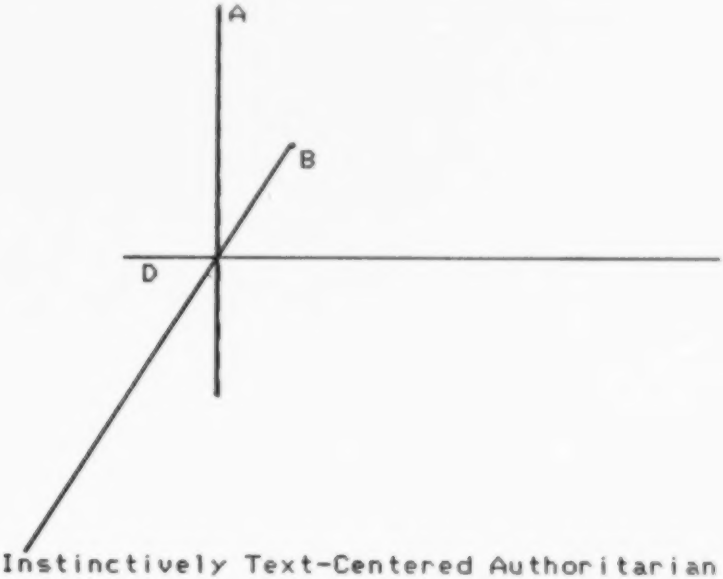
As discussed above with the Focus and Attitude Continua, this Interactional Continuum could cross the intersection of the first two at any point. Thus a tutor who has logically chosen to focus on the writer's text might do so in a tutor-centered, authoritarian manner (by unilaterally offering comments and suggestions); in a collaborative, conversational manner (by identifying a problem area and assisting the writer in an attempt to revise); or from a student-centered, receiving position (by expressing audience confusion and leaving the writer to clarify).

Conclusion

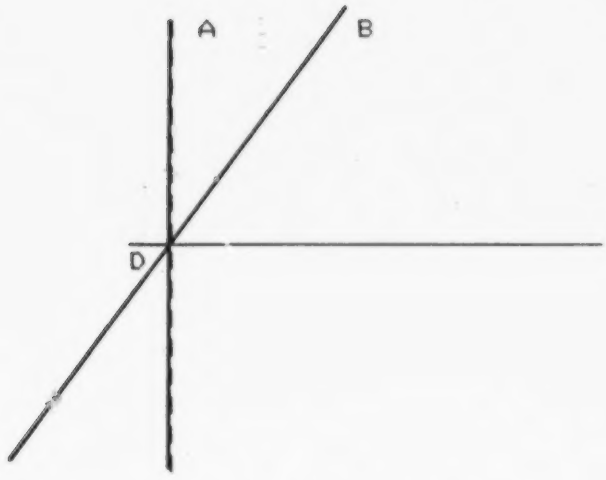
This model, then, is really three models sliding across one another. In every tutoring situation the tutor, working in collaboration with the writer and the text, adopts Focus, Attitude, and Interaction methods. These three positions can be plotted on each of the axes I have suggested, their intersection being the tutoring basis at that time and for that situation. The whole process, though, can and must remain dynamic and kinetic. These three-dimensional models, then, can only be descriptive and can only be so for brief moments of a tutoring session. Figure D displays several of the descriptions possible.



Pedagogically Rule-Governed Conversant



Instinctively Text-Centered Authoritarian



Logically Process-Centered Receiver

Figure D--Three-Dimensional Tutoring Models
Line A represents the Focus Continuum, Line B the Attitudinal Perspective, and Line D the Interactional Continuum

By identifying locations along continua, we may finally conduct a comprehensive discussion of peer tutoring. When we discuss peer tutoring, we only need to designate points on each of the continua, the intersection being our point of departure.

By combining the points I have identified on the continuua, we can identify 36 tutoring types. Further naming of points would allow an infinite number of types and an infinite number of discussions. While the model does not limit the variations, it does give us a locater system for designating roles. It also allows us to immediately differentiate between concepts which seek to address only one or two facets of tutoring--such as those of Ellson which concentrate on Logic--and those which strive for a broader

basis--such as those of Lorch which advocate Text-centered Pedagogical Authority.

However, the majority of theories up to now have been unilateral discussions of tutoring, plottable on only one point of one axis. Therefore, we have been unable to work within and develop along a common ground. When Bruffee talks conversation, Ellson elevates logic, and Lorch identifies weakness, the three of them are on different axes; their discussions have no common ground. Further, much of the literature on peer tutoring describes static, unmoving models. These allow no room for the tutor to adjust to stimuli, between or during sessions.

This mapping of theories will also allow us to approach new ground in both tutor research and tutor training. Studies could be designed which would test the boundaries of such a three-dimensional concept, allowing us finally to expand and contract the model based more on informational analysis and less on theoretical concepts. And such a model, initially constructed to describe theories and later restructured by research, might eventually offer a new heuristic for training peer tutors.

Works Cited

Beck, Paula, Thom Hawkins, and Marcia Silver. "Training and Using Peer Tutors." College English 40 (1978): 432-49.

Brannon, Lil and C. H. Knoblauch. "A Philosophical Perspective of Writing Centers and the Teaching of Writing." Writing Centers: Theory and Administration. Ed. Gary A Olson. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984. 36-47.

Brostoff, Anita. "The Writing Conference: Foundations." Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs. Ed. Muriel Harris. Glenview IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1982. 21-26.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. "The Brooklyn Plan: Attaining Intellectual Growth through Peer-Group Tutoring." Liberal Education 64 (December 1978): 447-468.

_____. "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" Writing Centers: Theory and Administration. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984. 3-15.

Clifford, John. "Composing in Stages: The effects of a Collaborative Pedagogy." Research in the Teaching of English 15 (1981): 37-53.

Ellson, Douglas. "Tutoring." The Psychology of Teaching Methods. Ed. N. L. Gage. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. 130-65.

Fishman, Judith. "The Tutor as Messenger." Writing Center Journal 1 (1981): 7-12.

Freedman, A. "A Theoretical Context for the Writing Lab." Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs. Ed. Muriel Harris. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1982. 2-12.

Gere, Anne Ruggles and Robert D. Abbott. "Talking about Writing: The Language of Writing Groups." Research in the Teaching of English 19 (1985): 362-380.

Hartwell, Patrick. "The Writing Center and the Paradoxes of Written-Down Speech." Writing Centers: Theory and Administration. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984. 48-61.

Hawkins, Thom. "Intimacy and Audience: The Relationship between Revision and the Social Dimension of Peer Tutoring." College English 42 (1980): 64-69.

Hurlow, Marcia. "Alleviating Writing Anxiety in Individual and Small Group Settings." Writing Center Association, 1983. ERIC ED 238 008.

Jacobs, Suzanne E. and Adele B. Karliner. "Helping Writers to Think: The Effect of Speech Roles in Individual Conferences on the Quality of Thought in Student Writing." College English 38 (1977): 489-505.

Kail, Harvey. "Collaborative Learning in Context: The Problem with Peer Tutoring." College English 45 (October 1983): 594-599.

Lorch, Sue. "Must Tutors Really be Nice?" Teaching English in the Two-Year College 9 (1983): 145-48.

Reigstad, Tom. "The Writing Conference: An Ethnographic Model for Discovering Patterns of Teacher Student Interaction." The Writing Center Journal 2 (Fall/Winter 1982): 9-19.

Reigstad, Thomas and Donald A MacAndrew. Training Tutors for Writing Conferences. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984.

Roderick, John. "Problems in Tutoring." Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs. Ed. Muriel Harris. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1982. 32-40.

Simard, Rodney. "Assessing a New Professional Role: The Writing Center Tutor." Writing Centers: Theory and Administration. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984. 197-205.